



Fact Sheet:

Polar Texas Oil Spill

from Ecology's Spill Prevention, Preparedness, and Response Program



Crude oil spill in Dalco Passage, Oct. 14, 2004.

Entities that responded to the spill

State

Dept. of Ecology
Dept. of Fish & Wildlife
Dept. of Health
Dept. of Natural Resources
Historic Preservation Office
Parks & Recreation Commission

Federal

U.S. Coast Guard
NOAA Fisheries
U.S. Navy
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Tribes

Puyallup Tribe
Muckleshoot Tribe

Local Governments

Fire, parks, and health agencies in King, Kitsap & Pierce counties

Animal Rescue

Progressive Animal Welfare Society

Private cleanup contractors

Clean Sound Cooperative
Global Diving & Salvage
Cowlitz Clean Sweep

Contact:

Larry Altose
Dept. of Ecology
425-649-7009
lalt461@ecy.wa.gov

Curt Hart
Dept. of Ecology
360-407-6990
Char461@ecy.wa.gov

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State Action – On the evening of Oct. 13, 2004, the oil tanker Polar Texas spilled a significant amount of crude oil in Dalco Passage. Polar Tankers, Inc. which owned the Polar Texas will pay the Department of Ecology \$540,000 for spilling oil to Washington waters. Polar Tankers, Inc. is owned by ConocoPhillips, the fifth largest fuel-refiner in the world.

Penalty Details – Polar Tankers and ConocoPhillips did not report or assist in the clean up of the spill. Ecology assessed maximum civil penalties to the companies for:

- Negligence in illegally spilling oil to state waters (\$260,000).
- Failing to clean up the spill (\$130,000).
- Failing to follow ConocoPhillips' state-approved oil spill contingency plan (\$130,000).
- Failing to notify state and federal response agencies about the spill (\$10,000).
- Discharge of oil into state waters, strict liability (\$10,000)

Compensation for Damages to State Natural Resources – State, federal and tribal authorities are currently involved in negotiating a natural resource damage assessment with the companies. The assessment is designed to compensate the public for damages to Washington's natural resources harmed by the crude oil spill.

Date of Spill Incident – The spill likely occurred at about 7 p.m. on Oct. 13, 2004. Ecology did not receive notice of the spill until at 1:40 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 14, 2004.

Spill Location – Dalco Passage, Colvos Passage and Quartermaster Harbor – the waterways that surround Vashon and Maury Islands.

Quantity/Product – More than 1,000 gallons of Alaska North Slope crude oil.

Spill Cause – It appears the spill occurred during a ballasting operation aboard the Polar Texas. The operation opened a path between the ship's cargo system and the water, providing an opportunity for an equipment malfunction or misstep in the ballasting process to release residual oil from a cargo tank.

Spill Size – The oil spill spread patches of oily sheen as far south as the Tacoma Narrows and as far north as Eagle Harbor. The sheen touched 15 miles of shore along Colvos Passage, the Narrows and Quartermaster Harbor and left a filmy coating along six miles of southern Vashon and Maury islands.

Response Activities – At its peak, the Polar Texas spill involved 286 people, 10 oil skimming vessels, 24,000 feet of various types of oil boom, three helicopters and additional boats and equipment.

Cleanup Activities – Crews recovered an estimated 59 tons of oily debris from shoreline cleanup and 6,842 gallons of oily water from skimming operations.

Response and Cleanup Costs – Federal and state agencies spent a total of about \$2.23 million to respond. The state alone spent \$483,000, which was reimbursed by federal funds.

Environmental Impacts – The heaviest oiling affected King County shorelines. King County closed several parks on Vashon and Maury islands until Oct. 29, 2004. The state Department of Health also closed several beaches to shellfish and seaweed harvesting.

Next Steps – The \$540,000 will go to Ecology's Vessel Response Account. This account is a dedicated account used for pre-positioning the Neah Bay rescue tug, or spot chartering tug service during periods of high risk.